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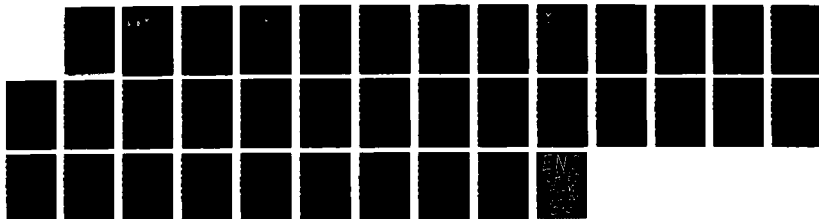
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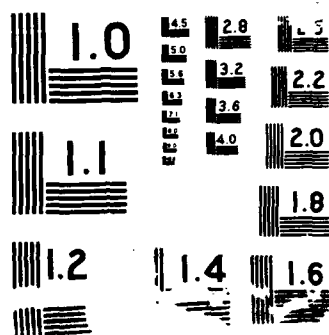
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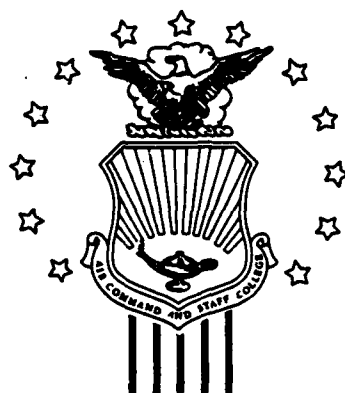


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STUDENT REPORT

BOOK ANALYSIS: THE RUSSIANS

MAJOR JUDITH I. CENTERS

88-0495

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REPORT NUMBER 88-0495
TITLE BOOK ANALYSIS: THE RUSSIANS

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of
requirements for graduation.

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE
AIR UNIVERSITY
MAXWELL AFB, AL 36112

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED			1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS	
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY			3. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF REPORT STATEMENT "A" Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.	
2b. DECLASSIFICATION / DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE				
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) 88-0495			5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION ACSC/EDC		6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable)	7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION	
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) Maxwell AFB, AL 36112-5542			7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)	
8a. NAME OF FUNDING / SPONSORING ORGANIZATION		8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable)	9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)			10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS	
			PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) BOOK ANALYSIS: THE RUSSIANS				
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) Centers, Judith I., Major, USAFR				
13a. TYPE OF REPORT		13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____	14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 1988 April	15. PAGE COUNT 33
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION				
17. COSATI CODES			18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)	
FIELD	GROUP	SUB-GROUP		
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) This report uses Hedrick Smith's book, <u>The Russians</u> to describe some of the problems that Mikhail Gorbachev faces today. The author then looks at changes that Gorbachev has made and concludes that he is unlikely to solve the domestic problems that confront the Soviet Union.				
20. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS			21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION UNCLASSIFIED	
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL ACSC/EDC Maxwell AFB, AL 36112-5542			22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) (205) 293-2867	22c. OFFICE SYMBOL

PREFACE

The author chose to analyze Hedrick Smith's The Russians because it portrays such vivid images of the Soviet Union. It is a straightforward book that gives insight into the daily lives of Soviet citizens. However, the book serves only as background for a more specific question: Is Mikhail Gorbachev likely to succeed or fail? His greatest task is to re-invigorate the Soviet economy by exposing corruption and by de-centralizing production.

The methodology chosen in this paper is to select some of the problems that Hedrick Smith describes in The Russians to illustrate the magnitude of the task that lies before Gorbachev. Foreign policy trade journals and the opinions of two experts will then serve to estimate the probability of Gorbachev's success.

—ABOUT THE AUTHOR—

Major Judith I. Centers was commissioned at OTS in 1973. After training at Chanute AFB, she served as an aircraft maintenance officer and then as Commander, Field Training Detachment 311 at MacDill AFB. In 1978, she was assigned to the Headquarters PACAF Inspector General team as an avionics inspector. She then served at Luke AFB as an aircraft maintenance officer until 1983 when she left active duty and joined the Air Force Reserve. She is presently serving as an Individual Mobilization Augmentee with the B-1 SPO at Wright-Patterson AFB. She holds a BA degree in English Literature from Berea College, Kentucky and an MPS Degree in Political Science from Auburn University, Alabama. Major Centers was a Distinguished Graduate from SOS in 1977, and completed ACSC by correspondence in 1985.

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"insights into tomorrow"

REPORT NUMBER 88-0495

AUTHOR(S) MAJOR JUDITH I. CENTERS

TITLE BOOK ANALYSIS: THE RUSSIANS

Faced with the domestic problems that confront the Soviet Union, is Mikhail Gorbachev likely to succeed or fail? The purpose of this paper is to answer that question. Hedrick Smith's book, The Russians is used as a background for this analysis.

The domestic problems that Smith described in The Russians over fifteen years ago, remain the most intractable problems faced by Mr. Gorbachev today. The lack of housing and consumer goods, the social inequality, and the apathy of the common man are some of the problems the General Secretary must solve to prevent the USSR from becoming a third-rate nation economically. Is he equal to the task?

This paper traces his rise to power and offers what little is known about his personal history. It then poses the question: Will Gorbachev's reforms make the Soviet Union a more liberal society? The conclusion is that his changes will tend to make the state machinery more efficient and therefore more repressive.

Finally, this paper estimates Gorbachev's chances for success. The foreign policy journals and two local experts agree that, although he may remain in power, he has little hope of re-invigorating an unhealthy economy.

Chapter One

OVERVIEW

Faced with the domestic problems that confront the Soviet Union, is Mikhail Gorbachev likely to succeed or fail? The purpose of this paper is to answer that question. Hedrick Smith's The Russians is used to set the stage; to provide the reader with some understanding of Russian daily life.

Hedrick Smith went to Russia in 1971 as a correspondent for the New York Times. Living intimately with the Soviet people, he even enrolled his children in the public schools. The Russians is his attempt to convey ". . .the texture and fabric of the personal lives of the Russians as people." (4:ix) He writes extremely well and his words convey images of Russian society that remain indelible. As an artist, Mr. Smith can bring Russia alive through his anecdotal glimpses far better than could reams of statistics or scholarly dissertations on politics. The problems Mr. Smith described in 1971 remain the most intractable domestic problems Mr. Gorbachev faces today. Chapter Two of this paper describes some of those problems. Chapter Three introduces Mikhail Gorbachev.

The present General Secretary began life as a peasant on a collective farm. Although not a great deal is known about his personal history, some background is presented to give at least a sketch of Gorbachev the man and a brief account of his rise to power.

Is Gorbachev a reformer who is liberalizing the Soviet Union or does he aim to make a totalitarian state more efficient and thereby more repressive? (5:620) Chapter Four presents the question as a pro and con debate--attempting to present each side fairly. This debate is a timely one since, as this is being written, America finds itself caught up in what the press has dubbed, "Gorby Fever" stemming from the 7 December 1987 Reagan-Gorbachev summit.

This paper will then look at the changes he has made since coming to power. The excerpts taken from The Russians will give the reader a good sense of the enormity of the problems he faces, i.e. the lack of consumer goods and housing, the shoddy workmanship, the inequality to be found in this "worker's paradise," the alcoholism, the hardship of rural life, and the failure of ideology to inspire the people. Some of these

problems Mr. Gorbachev has tackled head-on. His first object for reform was the problem of alcoholism. Many of the other problems will be helped if he can invigorate an economy which stagnated during the Brezhnev years.

In a final chapter, this paper will estimate Mr. Gorbachev's chances for success. That estimate will be based on the consensus of some of the foreign policy journals and the opinions of two local experts.

Mikhail Gorbachev is still the youngest member of the Politburo. (14:3) Given the political longevity of Soviet leaders, it is conceivable that he will still be in power when the Air Command and Staff College class of 1988 begins to draw Social Security benefits. Since his success or failure and his vision of the Soviet future will impinge directly upon the foreign policy of the United States, he is a political leader we should study and attempt to understand. A first step to that understanding begins with a look at Russian society as described by Hedrick Smith.

Chapter Two

LIFE IN RUSSIA

Hedrick Smith's The Russians gives the reader an idea of the magnitude of the problems that face Mikhail Gorbachev. Mr. Smith reveals that the supposed "classless society" is far from classless. The social order borders upon a caste system and the inequities present are a mockery of the tenets of Marxist-Leninism. He reveals the resignation of the average Russian who has some money but little to spend it on; who has lost faith in ideology and has little hope of bettering his lot. Smith chooses to first describe not the socialist worker, but the aristocracy of Russian society--the elite.

"Russian society is a pyramid." (4:39) There is an enormous mass of peasants and workers on the bottom and no middle class to speak of. At the top of that pyramid is found the elite of Russian society. It is they who hold the monopoly on wealth, power, and privilege. But what distinguishes these privileged ones even more is their "access." Smith describes a store open only to those with a special pass:

These stores insulate the Soviet aristocracy from chronic shortages, endless waiting in line, rude service and other daily harassments that plague ordinary citizens. Here, the politically anointed can obtain rare Russian delicacies like caviar, smoked salmon, the best canned sturgeon, export brands of vodka or unusual vintages of Georgian and Moldavian wines, choice meat, fresh fruits and vegetables in winter that are rarely available elsewhere. (4:26)

Referring to these lucky patrons, one Russian put it, "For them . . . Communism has arrived." (4:27) And for "them," privilege and power bring access to travel, access to serially controlled books, even a chauffeur driven automobile and perhaps most important of all, access to the best schools and universities for their children.

Because they have access to good schools for their children, the elite are able to institutionalize their life of privilege by passing it on to their children. The most sought out institutions are the schools of journalism and law at Moscow State University. Entrance to one of these schools can lead to a career in politics. Also popular are the schools of

international relations and foreign languages which promise careers with a chance to travel. Although entrance requirements are highly competitive, if one has the requisite influence, failing grades get transformed to straight A's. Thus the life of privilege is passed on to the next generation. (4:47)

The ordinary Russian is aware of these inequities but probably cannot envision the vast gulf that separates his life from the elite. And even if he did, it would not be a topic for conversation. Still, the discontent comes out in grumbled complaints. As one elderly woman put it, "We hate those special privileges. During the war when they were really our leaders it was all right, but not now." (4:51) Or a mechanic who installed air-conditioning in apartments for the elite: "Look at all they have! Why did we fight the Revolution?" (4:51) But all in all, the sentiment is not "throw the rascals out" but rather how can they beat the system and get a small slice of the pie for themselves. (4:52)

One of the problems that has always plagued the USSR is a shortage of consumer goods. Though it seems that each new First Secretary begins his rule by attempting to alleviate the problem, nothing seems to change. Inevitably there are chronic shortages, particularly of the better-made items imported from the Eastern Bloc. As a result, the average Russian must spend several hours each day waiting to purchase the basic necessities or the occasional luxury. The problem is so pervasive that Smith calls queuing, a Russian institution. (4:64) If it gets out that some hard-to-get item is now available, consumers rush like lemmings to stand in that particular line--often not knowing what the line is for. Women carry a string shopping bag and men a briefcase at all times for just such opportunities, for stores, of course, do not supply paper bags. (4:62) Any Western society would find the resultant hours of wasted time appalling. Surely, it is one factor that hobbles the Soviet economy not to mention the debilitating effect it must have on the frustrated consumer.

One of the Soviet Union's most pressing needs is for adequate housing. As usual, Smith does not rely on statistics to paint the picture. Instead he describes the reality of hundreds of Muscovites milling around a city square with signs pinned to their jackets advertising their apartments for trade. (4:76) He even describes one man living in a nine-room apartment with fifty-four other people. (4:78) Young couples are forced to live with in-laws for years. It is little wonder then that divorce rates are high and birth rates for city-dwellers are low.

While Americans may shake their heads in disbelief at the lot of the typical Russian and wonder how they can tolerate such conditions, one must look at it from the Russian perspective. If he does not begrudge standing in long lines for a loaf of bread, it is because he can remember a time when there was no bread. He

can only compare his present situation with his own past and seen through the eyes of one who has endured war, famine, and purges, the progress has been nothing short of miraculous. (4:80)

It is not surprising that Russians look for an escape from the waiting, the pushing, the lack of privacy, and for a Russian that escape is vodka. Drinking vodka for a Russian is as second nature as is drinking Coke for an American. They drink not to get drunk but to get numb. Smith found that, "Drunks, stiff as boards, or crumpled into heaps, litter the city sidewalks at holiday time, not just in skid row areas, but almost anywhere." (4:122) Despite its periodic condemnation, the State has the liquor monopoly and no doubt profits enormously from the sale of vodka. It is the one popular consumer item that is never in short supply. (4:121-122) The debilitating effect that all this drinking has on the economy must be mind-boggling. The cumulative effect of missed work-days, injuries, mistakes, and decreased life-span of workers is difficult to imagine. It is not surprising then that fourteen years later Mr. Gorbachev was to make this problem one of his first priorities.

One of the best ways to gain insight into a society is to look at its educational system. Even at that time, in the early 1970s, there was a great gap between the top city schools and the provincial ones. So much so that Smith felt the system was institutionalizing the class structure. (4:156) For example, one of the top physics-mathematics schools is so exclusive that it admits only 300 students from a competitive pool of 1 million. (4:156) At the other end of the spectrum are schools every bit as bad as our worst ghetto schools where students are illiterate but are passed anyhow so that the principal can meet his quota. (4:157) Interestingly Smith identifies a conflict that Gorbachev will address many years later, namely, the fact that after eighth grade most students either drop out or go to vocational school because they are effectively shut out of higher education. While the parents naturally want more education for their children the state needs more blue-collar workers. (4:157) As always, the state wins. Although the study of Marxist-Leninist precepts is part of the education of every child, it seems that few adults retain any of their childish enthusiasm for the subject.

The average Russian takes little if any interest in his government or in Communist Party ideology. Perhaps this is partly due to the constant bombardment of propaganda on TV, at work, over loudspeakers in the parks, and on posters several stories high. The people no longer see it; they are immune to it. Smith quotes a middle-aged man who does not understand his son's disregard for ideology:

It was only just last year at school when someone told him it would help him into university to be in the Komsomol that he got around to it. He simply went to

the office, signed up and they gave him a Komsomol card. There was a little ceremony. But it meant nothing to him. He was happy if it would help him get into the university. And at the Komsomol office, they were happy to get another member for their quota. But in fact, neither he nor they cared. (4:187)

If life in the cities sounds grim and colorless, it is even more so as one moves further into the countryside. Like the serfs before them, the peasants work the land by hand, only 20 percent of farm work was mechanized in 1970. (4:209) To the brutal work, add the isolation, the "Tobacco Road emptiness of village life," the enforced isolation of the snow in winter and the axle-deep mud in spring, and it is small wonder that the young people all want to leave for the cities. (4:209)

One would think that industry would be the one area in Russian life where things would work with clockwork precision. After all, it is industry that has allowed the nation to accomplish so much since World War II. But Smith depicts the strange game of catch-up that the Russians call "storming." The month is divided into three ten-day periods and nothing gets done in the first period and precious little is accomplished in the second ten-day period. It is in the last ten days of the month when the workers are fully recovered from their hangovers and all needed parts are at hand, that the month's quota must be feverishly produced. That is "storming." (4:215-216)

And by that time quality is out the window. Smith quotes a factory worker as saying:

Volume is the main thing. Some workers are sent to finish the items that were partly assembled and kept in storerooms. Some of the production is no longer finished in factory conditions but often in open air. Water, dirt, and dust can fall in the equipment which, of course, lowers its quality and cuts down its life span. (4:217)

So it goes. These are just a few of the examples that Hedrick Smith uses to give the reader a feel for life in the Soviet Union. The overall impression is starkly unrelieved. The economic problems faced by the nation appear overwhelming and call for profound change. Possibly no leader is equal to the task, but the man to whom it falls is Mikhail Gorbachev.

Chapter Three

GORBACHEV'S BACKGROUND

Mikhail Gorbachev's life rivals the classic American success story. This chapter will broadly trace his rise from peasant to the highest office in the land. Few details of his life are public knowledge. For example, no one seems to know about his father or even when he died. Much is left unanswered. The reader can only speculate as to how he managed his rapid rise to power. Another unanswered question is how this provincial farm boy became the urbane cosmopolitan who has charmed the world's leaders. As quoted by CBS News, Gorbachev stated at a Washington party in his honor, "Someday, the whole story of my rise to General Secretary will be told. But not tonight." And not in this paper.

Traditionally, the highest Soviet officials conceal their backgrounds from the public. (3:44) Gorbachev is no exception since very little is known about him, especially about his youth. We do know that he was born in the village of Privolnoye about 1000 miles from Moscow on 2 March 1931. (3:43) He was the son of peasants and as a teenager drove a combine on a collective. (3:43) Although nothing is known about his father, his mother still lives in her native village. (3:43) Because he came of age when demobilization was occurring, he never served in the military. (8:15) He was a member of the Komsomol and must have been an outstanding young man for he won the rare honor of the "Red Banner of Labour Group." (3:47) He was then accepted at Moscow University and the field he chose to study was law. (2:34)

To a Westerner, studying law at Moscow University in the early 1950s must have been an Orwellian experience. The author, Zhores Medvedev, gives us this glimpse of the curriculum. Gorbachev's textbooks presented Stalin's show trials of the 1930s as examples of true "socialist legality." The law profession was dominated by the Soviet General Procurator, A.Y. Yvinshinski, who believed in using torture in lieu of evidence and was opposed to independent defense lawyers. To quote Medvedev: ". . .in a socialist system, where judge, investigator and procurator all want to establish truth and justice, a defense lawyer is unnecessary. Defense lawyers try to mislead the court." (2:40)

Although law was a low prestige career in 1950, (2:35) it had its advantages for a student. According to the author, Schmidt-Hauer, students were allowed to ". . .examine the

origins of ideas about the state." (3:49) Although it was far from a free-wheeling examination, at least the students were exposed to the origins of law and the history of political ideas. So Gorbachev got an extremely rare opportunity for a young Soviet man: " . . .the opportunity to gain an insight into a different political culture." (3:49)

For the five years that Gorbachev was at Moscow University, he roomed with a Czechoslovakian student, Zydnek Mylnar. Mylnar later emigrated to Austria and is presently an author. (2:37) He offers us these insights into the character of Mikhail Gorbachev:

To him, Marxist theory was not a collection of dogmas to be learned by rote; to him it had practical significance. I believe that, even after a lapse of 30 years, Gorbachev will not use that theory to win power. He is certain to realize today what power is and what practical politics are. But I think that politics and power are not goals in themselves for Gorbachev. He is no cynic. There is a lot of the reformer in his make-up. He regards politics as a means to an end, but his eyes are fixed on the end--human needs--not the means. (3:52)

In addition to his law studies, Gorbachev became head of the student Komsomol. Fellow students remember him as " . . .an earnest young man overly prone to giving speeches about duty to party and country. 'He just loved to make speeches,' said one woman who attended the law faculty classes at that time." (1:30)

In 1952, Gorbachev finished his studies and married Raisa, a philosophy graduate at the university. (3:52,53) He joined the Communist Party and returned to his home region, Stavropol, to work for the Komsomol. (3:51,53) Work in the Komsomol was not prestigious; his duties were to help organize youth activities, supervise elections, and give speeches. (2:48) He did well and was rapidly promoted to Secretary in 1956 and First Secretary in 1958. Then his career took a turn away from the Komsomol and into agriculture as he became the party organizer for agriculture in the Stavropol region. (3:53) Thus began his association with Fedor Kulakov who was the First Secretary of the Stavropol district Party and was to prove a major force in Gorbachev's rise to power. (2:14) Gorbachev enrolled in a correspondence course in agriculture and in 1967 he qualified as a "scientific agricultural agronomist." (3:53) He proved to be an innovator. He used one of the collectives in his region as a model where he put new ideas into practice: he improved the peasants' living standards, installed gas and electricity and gave them a great deal of autonomy to decide what and how they produced. (1:37) Also in 1967, Raisa completed her doctoral dissertation on the daily lives of collective farm peasants--a sociological study

performed at a time when sociology was not recognized in the Soviet Union. (3:53-57)

Though far from Moscow, Stavropol was famous for the curative powers of its mineral springs. A frequent visitor to the springs and a powerful party official, Yuri Andropov, Chief of the KGB, was to become Gorbachev's mentor. (3:64)

In 1968, Fedor Kulakov, by then the Secretary of Agriculture, died; reason unknown. (3:62) Gorbachev was brought to Moscow to replace Kulakov and at the age of 47 found himself in the midst of the nation's leadership. (3:63) Before he reached the age of 50, he was a full member of the Politburo plus he had the dual function of Central Committee Secretary.

In November 1982, Leonid Brezhnev died and the next day Yuri Andropov was elected to be his successor. (3:80) Andropov set the style that Gorbachev was later to adopt. It was Andropov who began a campaign against worker absenteeism. (3:86) But seriously ill with kidney disease, Andropov had little time to implement his reforms. When he died 10 February 1984, there were two choices to replace him, Konstantin Chernenko, three years older than Andropov and suffering from emphysema and cirrhosis, or Mikhail Gorbachev. (3:96) Gorbachev stood aside and Chernenko began his 13 month reign.

Since Chernenko was gravely ill, plans were being made for an orderly transfer of power at the 27th Party Congress. Since that Congress would have brought only bad news regarding agriculture--Gorbachev's responsibility--it is unlikely that a consensus could have developed for him. (2:6) Fate was on Gorbachev's side, however, and on 10 March 1985, at the age of 54, Mikhail S. Gorbachev was elected General Secretary of the Communist Party and the eighth leader of the Soviet Union. (3:12)

Gorbachev's often-mentioned policy of "glasnost" does not apply to his private life. "He has actively discouraged coverage of his personal life and family, saying he has no patience for the kind of personality cult that developed around Stalin." (17:6) Indeed, one of his first acts upon being elected was to inform the Soviet press that they did not have to quote him in every article. (3:122) According to the New York Times, "Unlike previous leaders, including Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev, Mr Gorbachev has not had his name and picture displayed on posters around the country and has not turned his birthday into a national event. He has not even awarded himself medals." (17:6)

That quiet modesty can work to his advantage. For example, the Soviet public never heard about Raisa Gorbachev's expensive tastes. (2:185) And his prominent birthmark is air-brushed out of Soviet still photographs. (2:160)

He is an extrovert. He does not smoke and drinks very little. He watches his diet and exercises frequently--taking brisk walks whenever possible. (1:16)

Apparently, his personality is quite impressive to those who meet him. He charmed the British press while visiting there in 1984 before becoming Head of State. Dennis Healey, a British journalist, described him thusly: "He is a man of exceptional charm with a relaxed, self-deprecating sense of humor . . . in discussions he is frank and flexible with a composure full of inner strength." (2:159) Former Speaker of the House, Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill gave his impression of Gorbachev: "About his ability, his talents, his frankness, his openness, I was tremendously impressed." (8:22)

Thus the consensus in the West is that he is a man of great personal charm--which especially stands out in relief when compared to his predecessors. He appears to be a breath of spring air--a reasonable man. But, are we simply projecting qualities on him that we want him to have? Is he likely to make fundamental changes? Is he a reformer, and if so, what will be the ramifications of such reforms? The following chapter attempts to answer these questions.

Chapter Four

IS GORBACHEV A LIBERAL?

The West has been hoping that a liberal would come to power in the Soviet Union. In his biography of Gorbachev, Schmidt-Hauer points out that when Andropov took office the Western media portrayed him as an urbane reformer who brought dissidents into his home for "well-lubricated discussions" and "'...a casual visitor' found him listening to a . . .Voice of America broadcast." (3:81-82) That the press would repeat such drivel about a former head of the KGB shows their gullibility. That others would read and believe it shows the West's longing for the Soviet Union to have a "reasonable man" as leader. (3:81-82)

Is Mikhail Gorbachev a reformer who will make basic changes to the system? Is he a liberal who is increasing personal freedoms? The following supports both sides of these questions as fairly as possible then concludes with a quote that reflects this author's opinion. The pro side of this controversy is presented as the starting point.

The Soviet Union is like an old house that has been boarded up since the days of Stalin--stale thinking, dust-covered bureaucracy, and much dirt swept under the rugs. Mikhail Gorbachev is doing spring house-cleaning. He has begun by freeing over 100 dissidents and is greatly expanding cultural freedoms. Andrei Sakharov and Elena Bonner had been in exile in Gorky for seven years, and in an unprecedented move, Gorbachev personally called Sakharov and informed him his internal exile was over. (13:6) Anatoly Scheransky and Yuri Orlov were allowed to emigrate and the poet, Irina Ratustrinskaya, was released from prison and allowed to emigrate. (19:1) While these are important humanitarian steps, even more significant is his encouragement of cultural freedoms in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's policy of "glasnost" or "openness" has resulted in a liberalizing of culture that has been rapid and quite dramatic. Thirty years ago, Boris Pasternak was forbidden to accept the Nobel Prize for Literature yet this year his novel, Doctor Zhivago, will be published in the Soviet Union for the first time and his dacha made into a museum. (15:141) Films that reveal the atrocities of the past are now being shown to full houses. The movie "Repentance", dealing with Stalin's crimes, recently opened in Georgia, his home province. (15:141) A movie called "Is It Easy to Be Young?" honestly portrays the alienation of Soviet youth

including the thousands of bitter young men home from the fighting in Afghanistan. (10:31-32) However, these facts mean something quite different from an alternative viewpoint.

To counter these arguments, the critic might reply: "Gorbachev is not doing spring house-cleaning, he is locking up the house more securely." He has freed a few well-known dissidents. In return he gets favorable world headlines while nothing is done for the human rights of millions of Soviets. Yuri Orlov and Anatoly Scheransky were not simply released--they were traded for Soviet spies held in the West. (19:1) As far as emigration is concerned, Gorbachev's record is far from "liberal." Emigration has practically stopped. There were only 1140 in 1985, compared to 51,320 in 1979 under Brezhnev. (19:4) The fact that Gorbachev personally called him did not change Sakharov's view of the government. Sakharov said that his release should be viewed ". . . in the context of long-term Kremlin repression of human rights and the imprisonment of thousands of prisoners of conscience." (19:3)

Under the Helsinki Final Act agreement, the Soviet Union agreed to ". . . respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience and religion as well as the free flow of ideas and people across state borders." (19:1) The Soviet Union has made a mockery of this agreement; going so far as to imprison 37 self-appointed Helsinki monitors--Yuri Orlov being one. (19:4)

It should also be noted that Gorbachev is making wide use of a law which allows him to keep ". . . political prisoners behind bars indefinitely by re-sentencing them for 'malicious disobedience' to prison administrators." (19:4) Lastly, Amnesty International has recently complained about the numerous cases of torture in the Soviet Union. Even the Soviet press has said that ". . . prisoners are sometimes beaten and exposed to the cold to get them to confess." (19:4)

Returning to the pro argument, cynics will say that "glasnost" is only a public relations campaign to make the Soviet Union look good to the world. Yes, the Soviet Union practices public relations much as the United States does but there is more to "glasnost" than "P.R.". Internally, "glasnost" means "openness" and it is a viable policy. (10:31) Here is how a Pravda editorial defines it: ". . . the active realization of truthfulness in assessing all phenomenon and events, intolerance of shortcomings, and a desire to do things better." (10:31)

It is useful to stop and consider the government that Gorbachev inherited. Because of Andropov's and Chernenko's brief tenures, it was basically a Brezhnev government. And it was exceedingly corrupt. Brezhnev based his power on letting the many bureaucracies build their empires. Under Brezhnev,

bureaucrats held office for life and then their replacements hobbled in to take over. "The political leadership had only superficial control of the bureaucracy . . ." and the bureaucrats had little if any accountability to those below them. (7:67)

"Glasnost" is the method Gorbachev has chosen to control the bureaucracies. The press has been given virtually a free hand to muckrake. "60 Minutes" style exposes are common on the TV and in the newspapers. For example, it was recently reported that " . . . 30,000 scientific workers had failed efficiency tests . . . 20,000 party members had been expelled and that 800 store managers had been arrested for corruption." (10:32) The author James Cracraft states that "glasnost" exposes "stagnation, corruption, inefficiency and other evils besetting Soviet society and . . . motivates the Soviet people to join in overcoming them." (10:31) And the last phrase, "motivate the Soviet people," is terribly important. Gorbachev stands at an economic precipice. His only hope in succeeding is to re-shape the attitudes of a cynical and alienated population.

To read the Western press accounts, one would think that "glasnost" is a new and liberal style. It is neither. Lenin used the word in 1919. (13:3) Khrushchev used it in the 1950s. (15:158) Since purges went out of style with Joseph Stalin, Gorbachev no longer has Stalin's methods to rid himself of Brezhnev's geriatric old guard. Therefore, he uses "glasnost" to expose them, fire them, and replace them with his own minions. (13:4) Secondly, he uses this concept to give the people the impression that corruption is being cleaned up; thereby winning their support (13:5) and adding legitimacy to his own regime. Externally, "glasnost" is a public relations offensive. A Kremlin spokesman, Georgiy Arbatov told the Central Committee of the Communist Party that it was " . . . necessary to continue publishing materials sharply critical of Soviet domestic problems to convince the West that the changes introduced by Gorbachev are serious and genuine." (13:6)

Finally, Julius Jacobson suggests that we judge Mikhail Gorbachev by his deeds not his words, and let us ask: "Where was 'glasnost' when it mattered so, in Chernobyl?" (15:152)

Ironically, in a country where collective thinking is reinforced beginning in kindergarten, (4:159) Mikhail Gorbachev is encouraging individual initiatives. In agriculture, he is creating family brigades on collective land, and he is trying to get peasants to produce more by guaranteeing they can sell their surplus in cooperative markets. (7:75) In industry, he is moving away from top-heavy Stalinist centralized planning, and managers are given much greater autonomy for implementing quality control and competition. (7:60) Wage differentials are being introduced--namely, the more you work, the more you are rewarded.

(15:151) These changes, radical as they sound, are merely the foundation for the changes that will come in the future.

It is appropriate to ask if Gorbachev's reforms are working. They are. "Overall growth in national income for 1986 was 4.1%, up a full percentage point from 1985." (10:32) The grain harvest increased significantly despite poor weather. Lastly, male life expectancy has begun to rise, due in some part, no doubt, to Gorbachev's campaign against alcoholism. (10:32)

Contrary to some opinions, Gorbachev is not building a workers' paradise. He has inherited an economic crisis that forces the Soviet Union to struggle mightily just to keep up with third rate powers. At the heart of his problems is the lack of worker productivity. His " . . . proposals include speedup and incentive pay based on the amount and quality of production. Teams of production workers will be pitted against each other. Assembly line workers will be expected to work faster and the lathe operator to turn out more and better parts." (15:151) Wages will no longer be equal, and " . . . the differential between the lowest and highest paid worker will rise from 58% to 80%." (15:151) To quote Gorbachev, "Work and work alone should be the criterion for determining a person's value." (15:151)

Gorbachev's policy of "democratization" is probably the most difficult for Westerners to understand. According to Seweryn Bialer, it is like our democracy, turned upside down. In the West, democracy is most visible at the "macrosocietal" level--state governments, the Congress--as you move downward to smaller social units such as " . . . corporations, enterprises, and trade unions," they are increasingly authoritarian. Gorbachev's idea is just the reverse. He envisions grass-roots democracy at the "micro-societal" level; workers freely electing managers, and citizens electing the members of the local soviets. (7:63-64)

He intends to achieve democratization through contested elections by secret ballots and to make Party officials accountable. (7:64) He is trying to form a bond with the people--as the author Peter Frank puts it, to " . . . rouse them from the state of inertia and indifference into which they had sunk." (11:86) But his critics persist in seeing things differently.

Gorbachev's brand of "democracy" is hard for the Westerner to understand because it is not democracy. Elections are to be held only on the lower levels. (13:7) Choices would be based strictly on personality differences since both candidates will be ideologically the same. (13:7) There is only one Party. There will continue to be only one Party. Gorbachev is not increasing the freedom of the Soviet people; he simply wants to restructure

the Party his way, and help shake the society out of its lethargy.

Lastly, the Party elite will retain the "...right to veto any candidate elected at the lower level, making an election of a Party official with truly independent views practically impossible." (13:7) It should be noted, also, that "...the Hungarian Communist Party has had more than one candidate in lower level Party elections ...for years ...and yet the Hungarian Communist Party is hardly a democratized institution." (15:148)

In defense of the pro side, one should note that Gorbachev has been in office less than three years. One cannot expect Jeffersonian democracy in the land of the czars in that length of time no matter how liberal the First Secretary. To which the hard-headed realist would reply: Read the headlines from a few weeks ago: "Gorbachev Denounces Stalin". Then think back to the 1950s; to Khrushchev's own "glasnost"; to Khrushchev's policy of "peaceful coexistence" so that he could rebuild the economy; his secret speech that denounced Stalin. What has changed?

Is Gorbachev a reformer? Yes, but not in the Western meaning of the word. The word "reform" does not come up in Soviet talk; instead they use the phrase, "improving the economic mechanism." (5:611) He has and will continue to make changes but the result may very well be the opposite of what the West wants and expects. Seweryn Bialer sums up this idea succinctly: "In the past the inefficiency of the state machinery tempered the oppressiveness of society. Should Gorbachev prove successful in making the state more efficient, the extent of its oppressiveness will also increase." (5:620)

The following chapter concerns just that; i.e. Gorbachev's attempts to make the State more efficient.

Chapter Five

CHANGES GORBACHEV HAS MADE

Gorbachev's task is to keep the Soviet Union from falling further behind economically. An enormous task at best, but when one considers that he must work shackled by the constraints of Marxism-Leninism, the task becomes large indeed. He seems intent on streamlining a cumbersome system. This part of the paper will describe those changes Gorbachev has made that affect the problems identified in The Russians. Some changes impact directly on the Soviet economy such as his attempt to decentralize bureaucratic control of industry. Other changes affect the social problems mentioned in The Russians: his campaign against alcoholism, his attempts to motivate the Soviet worker, changes in the educational system and possibly his greatest challenge, i.e., how to instill belief in the system among the alienated masses. He has moved quickly to establish a political base in the Politburo, and he will need all the support he can muster to implement his reforms. First and foremost is his desire to re-structure the economy.

When Mikhail Gorbachev assumed power he inherited an economic crisis. The heavily centralized top-heavy system that worked wonders for the economy in the 1930s has outlived its usefulness. Gorbachev's solution is "perestroika" or "re-structuring" of the economy. Schmidt-Hauer calls it an attempt to de-Stalinize the centralized economic system. (3:1) Or as another author, Marshall Goldman, puts it,

To increase efficiency, Gorbachev has . . . decided to restructure the Soviet economic system so that less power is allocated vertically. For instance, he has created local economic units so that enterprises from two different ministries in Kharkov, a town in the Ukraine, can deal with each other on the spot rather than submitting all their negotiating documents back and forth through Moscow (12:19).

Some seem to think that "perestroika" means great changes will be occurring in the Soviet economy; that the Soviet economy will become more "capitalistic" like those in Eastern Europe. However, the evidence indicates that is not Gorbachev's intention at all. He does not want to reform the present system; he simply wants to streamline it. In a speech given to the secretaries of the East European Communist parties in the summer of 1985,

Gorbachev warned against the false glitter of market-oriented reforms. After acknowledging the difficult situation of the East European economies, he remarked: 'Many of you see the solution to your problems in resorting to market mechanisms in place of direct planning. Some of you look at the market as a lifesaver for your economies. But, comrades, you should not think about lifesavers but about the ship, and the ship is socialism.' (5:612)

Because of his background and training, Gorbachev is better prepared to deal with agricultural problems than any of his predecessors (2:198). His first step was to reorganize the agricultural administration and bring everything under the umbrella of the State Agro-Industrial Committee. (2:204-205) His next move was to increase the number of private plots that city dwellers could use. Although these plots do not produce much, their existence does help reduce the demand on urban markets. (2:201)

Neither of the above changes is substantial and neither will have a perceptible effect on agriculture. His predecessor, Brezhnev, poured money (38% of all investment) into agriculture, but harvests fell sharply even in those areas with good soil. While money spent on agriculture increased by 42 percent in the 1970s, " . . .productivity per hectare declined by 50 percent." (18:22)

There is no reason to think that additional reorganization or sinking of more money into agriculture would increase production. It appears that the only alternative would be the "expansion of the private sector." No one mentions that because, "To deviate from the existing system in such a manner would mean the triumph of an economic over a political approach." (18:23)

If the biggest barrier to reform is the system, the second biggest obstacle is the Soviet worker. The bizarre loaf-and-catch-up work habits described in The Russians are not conducive to quality but are well suited to a large quantity of sub-standard goods. Because of the way the system is, there is no motivation to produce high quality--just meet the quota. Gorbachev seems interested in changing this situation. "During his travels in the West, Gorbachev has displayed great interest in determining the motivations that made workers in factories and on farms so apparently eager to produce more than their counterparts in the Soviet Union." (1:20) A simple answer would be to provide more incentives. He has promised to increase consumer goods but that will require a re-ordering of priorities which so far has not taken place.

Job security has always been a given for the Soviets--no matter that ten men did the work of six--not anymore. He is actually starting to lay off some workers; 12,000 employees of the Belorussian railway system, for example. Bureaucratic re-shuffling into the "State Agro-Industrial Committee" in 1985 resulted in "several thousand bureaucrats" losing their jobs (9:39).

Thus, the worker is faced with higher expectations for quality and quantity yet has less job security. It will be extremely challenging for Gorbachev to motivate these workers, given this situation, and the lack of consumer goods to serve as incentives.

The Russians' love for alcohol has been a large contributing factor to the lack of worker productivity. Gorbachev's first campaign was to cut down the consumption of alcohol by the populace. He did so with vigor by means of:

. . .removal of all officials who took part in or permitted drinking bouts; a ban on alcohol in workplaces, official banquets and receptions . . . and in all forms of public transport; the restriction of alcohol sales to the hours of 1400-1900 and the raising of the legal age . . .from 18 to 21. (3:124-125)

He went further, however, by budgeting 3% of the housing income on sports facilities and directing deposit of the wages of heavy drinkers. A 30 percent increase in the price of vodka meant that one bottle would cost the average worker one-tenth of his monthly income. Eventually, Gorbachev relented somewhat on his alcohol campaign and allowed 400 places in Moscow where alcohol could be bought. (3:125-127)

While it is unlikely that his campaign won him any friends, it was responsible for some new jokes: "As one Muscovite says to his friend as they stand in line in front of a liquor store, 'We shouldn't complain that Gorbachev is a teetotaler. Can you imagine what would have happened if he were impotent?'" (12:19)

The General Secretary has adopted as his own an educational reform begun during Andropov's years. Its purpose is to provide more workers for a declining blue-collar labor force by doubling the number of children who go to vocational school and excluding them from the option of pursuing the "academic track." Of course, these blue-collar and peasant children have always been underrepresented in higher education (Gorbachev's education being one notable exception) but before this reform, at least some had an option. This move will " . . .intensify the process of the hereditization of the Soviet working class, already well-advanced, as working class children are 'tracked' into the

(vocational schools), whose aim is to provide skilled workers for the economy." (9:36-38)

Gorbachev must either revive ideology or substitute nationalism for ideology. In today's USSR, the principal function of ideology is to keep the elite in power. (16:247) Propaganda washes over the citizen from the cradle to the grave. Not surprisingly, there is a large bureaucracy that promotes ideology, the " . . . 'Zhaniye' (knowledge) society, who delivered 25.1 million lectures on party, political and other themes in 1983 to a total audience in excess of 1.1 billion." (20:1) Yet despite the constant intrusiveness of posters, TV, newspapers, and interminable lectures, "The attraction of Soviet ideology declined steeply, both at home and abroad. Its effectiveness as a mobilizing and legitimizing force has radically diminished." (5:607) The ideologists who preach the USSR as a "workers" paradise" have a daunting task, " . . . the greatest problem in the party's ideological work is probably the manifest discrepancy between the overblown claims of official ideologists and the unprepossessing realities of Soviet daily life." (20:17)

It has long been clear that communist ideology by itself is an insufficient source of legitimacy. Nationalism--really Russian nationalism, barely disguised to accommodate the multinational Soviet state--has been the most effective substitute for Marxist-Leninist zeal since Stalin put it at the center of the war effort against Germany. Today Gorbachev usually tells his countrymen that their past efforts were worthwhile because they make the Soviet Union a great world power, and rarely because they advance communism or world revolution. (16:247)

Politically, Gorbachev has moved quickly to clear the Party of Brezhnev's geriatric appointees and to consolidate his own power. He has in a very public way fired party and state leaders. "In so doing, he has given Soviet citizens something to cheer about, as the incompetent, but especially the corrupt (who used elevated positions to enrich themselves) are laid low." (9:34)

Has he built a power base sufficient to support the reforms he wants to make? The next chapter relies on policy journals and interviews with two experts to estimate Mikhail Gorbachev's probability of succeeding.

Chapter Six

WILL HE SUCCEED?

When one asks if Gorbachev will succeed, one must first discuss what is meant by "success." Conceivably, "success" for him is simply staying in office. It is possible that with a sufficiently strong political base he could retain his office without really affecting the decline in the Soviet economy. Whether or not he has the political base now to do so is impossible to say. Undoubtedly there is some opposition to him. When he disappeared for 53 days in August and September 1987, some believed he had been ousted. (17:6) However, for the purpose of this paper, success for Gorbachev is defined as substantially invigorating the Soviet economy; stimulating economic growth and that, in turn, largely depends on changing deeply ingrained attitudes. Somehow, he must begin to modernize the economy and join the technological race. His chances for success will be estimated, by weighing the opinions of two scholars of the Soviet Union and the consensus of the foreign policy journals.

This author interviewed Dr Howard Hensel, Professor, Soviet Military Studies at Air War College, Maxwell AFB, Alabama and elicited his opinion on Gorbachev's chances for success. Dr Hensel defines Gorbachev's success as achievement of a growing, balanced economy. Balance would entail more consumer items and less military expenditures. In order for the economy to grow it must become more efficient either through better planning (perhaps with the help of computers) or the de-centralization that Gorbachev is attempting. The biggest obstacle to his reforms will be bureaucrats such as factory managers who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. From the Soviet worker what is needed is the idealism such as that found in the Komsomol members of the 1930s who enthusiastically labored in Siberia to build Communism. Can he capture the imagination of today's Soviet worker? Quite possibly. His challenge then is to make changes while at the same time maintaining firm control of the Party, and the society. Dr Hensel believes that he will fail--that not more than 40 percent of his reforms will be successful. (22:--)

Dr David Albright is Professor, National Security Affairs at Air War College. He sees the Russian people as the most significant obstacle to change. Theirs is a very conservative political culture--one resistant to change. What Gorbachev is

proposing are the most sweeping reforms since Czar Alexander II. What is fundamental is the clear-cut distinction in the mind of the average Soviet between his public and private life. He has a guaranteed life-long job; all he need do is show up. Afterwards he goes off to do what he really wants to do. The people who are most perturbed are a lot of the common citizens. Although they do not see any improvement in their lives they are being asked to work harder. Gorbachev must provide incentives to show them the benefits of reform--increased availability of food and consumer goods. (21:--)

Is Gorbachev so zealous that he would risk his position in order to implement his reforms? Dr Albright believes, "He must be wily or he wouldn't be there." He may retreat here and charge forward there but he is a Russian nationalist with a vision; unless something is done, unless they re-structure and become more efficient and learn to produce technology, they will wind up as a third-rate nation; and that, as a nationalist, he cannot tolerate. "Will he succeed? Who knows?" But most of the scholars Dr Albright knows give him only a fifty-fifty chance. In 1986, scholars were asking: Is he serious? Now they are asking, how successful will he be? Dr Albright believes, "We won't know for another 20 years." (21:--)

The foreign policy trade journals are also pessimistic about Gorbachev's chance of success. In an article in Foreign Affairs, Robert G. Kaiser, assistant managing editor of The Washington Post writes:

It is much easier to be pessimistic than hopeful about Gorbachev's--and his country's--prospects. The Soviet Union's survival is not in question here; even if Gorbachev fails as a reformer, his country will survive, and will almost certainly remain strong and powerful for as long as he rules it. But unless he is a fabulously successful reformer, Gorbachev will not be able to revive the Soviet Union as a genuine competitor for world leadership with the United States and its allies. Instead he will preside over a continuing process of muddling downward that could leave the Soviet Union, by the turn of the century, far behind many more dynamic societies in the world, still offering its citizens a second- or third-class standard of living while, no doubt, still bristling with first-class military power. (16:246)

Seweryn Bialer, Ruggles Professor of Political Science of Columbia University, agrees with Kaiser stating that "Gorbachev will, in all probability, improve Soviet performance. But what he can do at most is set into motion the forces of change in a land that for decades has viewed change as the enemy." (6:51)

And Walter D. Connor, Professor of Political Science, Boston University, states:

. . .it may be that Gorbachev, however healthy, runs much greater risk of losing power and office than, in retrospect, did Brezhnev in his first five years or so at the helm. Despite the precedent of Brezhnev's 18-year reign, I would rate Gorbachev's chances of being in power in the year 2000 as no better than even, and probably less. (9:46)

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSIONS

Hedrick Smith's book, The Russians, was a bestseller because so little was known about the Soviet Union. The same is true today. The West tends to view the Soviet Union from an ethnocentric viewpoint. We remain ever hopeful that they will become more like us. Each time the Soviets adopt a Western innovation from soft-drinks to fast food, we see it as evidence that they are becoming more capitalistic, more reasonable, more like us. They are not. The Russians is an excellent starting point to reach that understanding.

The West's concept of Mr Gorbachev is another example of ethnocentric perception. In our desire for him to be like any other head of state, truth has not been served. There is no reason to believe that his reforms will result in increased personal liberties for the Soviet citizen. There is every reason to believe, however, that if "Gorby Fever" is any indication, the West will perceive him as more and more liberal.

It is interesting that the problems described by Hedrick Smith fifteen years ago remain to confront Mikhail Gorbachev. Imbued with the belief that the communist system will inevitably triumph, traditionally the Soviets have been in no hurry to make changes. Perhaps they should be. One gets a sense of urgency from the foreign policy journals as if there is a point beyond which the Soviet economy cannot recover. Looking at the changes Gorbachev has made, one is unable to see any new ideas that have not been tried before. His idea of "glasnost" dates back to Lenin and Khrushchev. The much vaunted "perestroika" is simply a reorganization; one that has not yet borne fruit. The West persists in seeing him as a reformer but it appears that he does not intend to change the system but merely to streamline it. Can he re-invigorate the Soviet economy and stop its decline? It is this author's opinion that he cannot. The Marxist-Leninist system, the national character of the people, and the national priorities skewed toward military might--all prevent him from making substantial changes, if that is his intention. In conclusion, Boris Rumer, a research associate at Harvard University's Russian Research Center, in an article entitled, "Realities of Gorbachev's Economic Program," has good advice for Mr Gorbachev:

It is possible that Gorbachev, once he has consolidated his power, will emerge as a great reformer, but his steps so far have been tentative and incomplete. In pondering the challenge of reform, the Soviet leader would do well to recall the advice of Winston Churchill regarding Khrushchev's bid to reform Soviet politics after the 20th CPSU Congress of 1956: "One cannot take two jumps to get across a precipice." (18:31)

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